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STATEMENT TO  
THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES  
BY RICHARD B. SCHREIBER

REGARDING GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 1012,  
AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS  
CONCERNING THE TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS FROM  
THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND SERVICES FOR THE BLIND  
AND THE COMMISSION ON THE DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED  
TO THE DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES

IN PUBLIC HEARING, TUESDAY, MARCH 15, 2011  
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

**Senator Musto, Representative Tercyak, members of the Joint Committee on Human Services, my name is Richard B. Schreiber. I live in Branford, Connecticut. My statement regards Senate Bill No. 1012, An Act Implementing The Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning The Transfer of Functions from The Board of Education and Services for the Blind and the Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired to the Departments of Education and Social Services.**

**I am a former Executive Director of the Connecticut Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI). I retired in 1994, following more than 30 years of state service.**

**I join others who applaud Governor Dannel Malloy's bold efforts to curtail the expenses of state government while seeking to improve efficiencies in government services. Nevertheless, I have some serious reservations about SB 1012. My concerns stem from**

**CDHI's loss of organizational autonomy through its mandated absorption into the Department of Social Services.**

**A legislative committee, predecessor to your own committee, was the cradle in which the necessity for a special agency to meet needs of Connecticut's deaf and hearing impaired citizens was clearly identified more than 35 years ago.**

**That earlier committee received and acted on a 1973 study commission report which spotlighted a host of problems that this state's deaf and hearing impaired citizens encountered with public and private services and agencies. On the legislative committee's joint favorable report, the General Assembly established CDHI.**

**Since then, CDHI has made substantial and impressive progress in coordinating, strengthening and implementing state policies affecting deaf and hearing impaired individuals and their relationship to the public, industry, health care and educational opportunity.**

**Although agency funding has had a painful downward trend in recent years, punctuated at times by hiring**

**freezes and other curtailments, CDHI currently provides direct services to the community which include advocacy, counseling and certified sign language interpreting services. The services are accessible to all deaf and hard of hearing people.**

**The dedicated work of the agency enables compliance with federal laws such as The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) and with state laws with respect to deaf and hearing impaired persons, mandating that the rights of all citizens, including persons with disabilities, be protected.**

**The Commission employs 43 sign language part-time interpreters; each is certified in accordance with national standards of The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and The National Association of the Deaf. Interpreting services of the agency are reimbursable. In each of the past two fiscal years nearly \$2 million dollars was reimbursed for services provided.**

**Also, during these two years, the agency has averaged about 1,600 requests each month, covering more than 16,500 interpreting assignments; an annual average totaling approximately 39,000 hours of interpreting services were provided by part-time interpreters.**

**The Commission provides interpreting services statewide. Such services enable state and municipal agencies, private non-profit organizations, also business and industry to meet legal obligations for equal access to goods and services for handicapped persons.**

**Interpreting appointments provide communication access within a wide spectrum of urgent and high priority matters including health, safety and legal circumstances. In recent years, such requests may pertain to Connecticut's Judicial Department, or the Department of Children and Families, or the State Police, also to local police departments and to hospitals statewide. Seventy-five percent of such interpreting services respond to requests made by other state agencies relating to state business.**

**Under statute, CDHI is mandated to monitor the statewide registry of Connecticut professional working sign language interpreters, assuring that only qualified interpreters are providing services. The agency is also responsible for overseeing Connecticut's Telecommunication Relay Services mandated by the Federal Communications Commission.**

**CDHI's personal counseling services, either individual consultations or family, are available in American Sign Language, Signed English and through speech reading. All communication is accessible for all parties involved. Counseling that is provided without communication barriers is productive and empowers individuals to maintain their independence and live productive lives. CDHI's 2 counselors cope with frequent demands for such counseling support. At times, a waiting list of more than 30 persons builds.**

**The agency's location is accessible by bus, and car with parking available. The office is client friendly and safe; all clients are greeted by an individual who can communicate in American Sign Language and is ready to assist them. It is generally reported that visitors feel welcome.**

**During business hours the CDHI telephone is always answered by an actual human being, the call never gets sent to voice mail, which is frustrating for individuals with hearing loss.**

**During my years of state service, it has always been a mystery to me why mergers, proposed in the name of greater efficiency, or justified by the purpose of**

**improved services, or persuaded by economies in expenses, always move in the direction of the larger agency. It's some kind of Newtonian principle of organizational gravity: the larger body attracts the smaller body.**

**These gravitational forces bring no regard for standards of agency mutual efficiency, each agency's achievements, the appropriateness for the agency clientele, or, most importantly, the culture of the agencies brought together, as reflected in their mandates.**

**The Department of Social Services (DSS) is a statewide public service agency which provides a broad range of services to the elderly, disabled, families and individuals who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self reliance and independent living.**

**DSS administers over 90 legislatively authorized programs and approximately one-third of the state budget. Accordingly, DSS is much involved, as it should be, with establishing client eligibility, maintaining admission standards, certification of proof**

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**of identity and other steps aimed at curtailing fraud, crookedness and tortfeasance.**

**However, this is not what CDHI is about. Clients do not seek rehabilitation from CDHI, they need communication assistance. CDHI functions ought not to become just one more service to be applied for through the DSS Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, producing application regulations and eligibility tests.**

**I urge your committee to conclude that the merger proposed, moving the small but clearly productive Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired into the Department of Social Services, will produce no fiscal savings of significance, will build no improvements in quality or scope of services, but will run the risk of deteriorating a distinguished record of service to a community-in-need which has been well served for more than 35 years.**

**Thank you.**